

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

WILLIAM NORTH

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

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Interviewers

Marcia North
(signature)

(signature)

(signature)

April 29, 1975
(date)

Interviewee

William North
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Lockport Ill
(city & state)

5-1-75
(date)

THE SCIENCE OF
THE FUTURE

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INTERVIEWEE: Mr. William North

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Marcia North

M. NORTH: This is an interview with my father William North for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project by Marcia North in Lockport, Illinois, on April 29, 1975, at three o'clock.

M. NORTH: Dad, tell us something about the land here in Lockport?

W. NORTH: Lockport is diversified between woodlands and prairies. It is divided by the DesPlaines River and the Illinois and Michigan Canal. The elevation rises to bluffs and beautiful tablelands with rolling prairies and the most productive soils.

M. NORTH: Could you tell us something about Lockport's early history?

W. NORTH: The first settlers were Armstead Runyon, his wife Anna, and several children, one of whom is my great-grandmother. Marcia, as you know, your great-great-grandmother was Mrs. Charles E. Boyer. Lockport was once known as Runyon Town. Runyon was born in Kentucky and moved to Ohio when he was fifteen years old, where he remained until 1827 when he moved to Danville, Illinois. He remained in Danville until coming to Lockport in 1830. The first white child born in Lockport was Orrin Runyon in the 1830's, 1833.

M. NORTH: What was their first winter like in 1830?

W. NORTH: The first winter here was known as the Deep Snow, so vividly remembered by some of the old settlers. Mr. Runyon had a large amount of stock which he left in Danville only bringing a few hogs with him



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thinking they would winter on nuts and acorns, but they all perished during the Deep Snow as he had nothing to feed them. In the spring, as soon as the snow had melted enough to allow safe travel, he took his men and went to Danville to get the remainder of his stock and food. The melting snow was so great, it detained him six weeks longer than he intended to be gone. His family ran out of food. Mrs. Boyer, Runyon's daughter (my great-grandmother) said, "They had nothing to live on except salt pork, and corn bread made of meal so musty it wasn't fit for a dog to eat."

M. NORTH: Tell us something about the Indians.

W. NORTH: My grandmother told me stories that her mother told her of how the friendly Pottawatomie Indians had camped on both sides of her father's tent. They always came in when passing, but they never did anything wrong. The blood-curdling howls of the prairie wolves . . . When the Indians came down with smallpox, Mrs. Runyon pulled the latch-string refusing to let any of them come in. . . The Indians were offended but made no trouble. When the Blackhawk War broke out, Runyon took his family to Hickory Creek to meet other settlers. Finding them gone, he then went to Fort Dearborn instead of going back to Danville which he had originally intended.

M. NORTH: Were there other settlers?

W. NORTH: There were many settlers that followed the Runyons such as Edward Poor, Mr. Butler -- who lived where Mr. Milan now lives on Seventh Street in Lockport, Lyman Hawley and his son -- who are also ancestors on my father's side. The Hawleys settled here in 1835. One of the Hawleys built the first electrical power plant here in Lockport.

M. NORTH: Tell us about the schools and churches.

W. NORTH: The first church in Lockport was the First Congregational Church. It originated in a stone house on State Street between Sixth and Seventh. The church originated in 1838 in October. They erected a building in 1839. Reverend Isaac Foster was the minister. The St. Dennis Church was organized in Haytown in 1837. Haytown was three miles north of Lockport. The church was moved to Lockport in 1846. The first village school was built at a cost of \$200 in 1839. Although Runyon Town . . . The first school was started in an old stone house on State Street. After they finished in the same house where the First Congregational Church was first originated, they had both in there. Runyon Town had another school they started in 1835.

M. NORTH: What about some of the early buildings in Lockport?

W. NORTH: The early building in Lockport was a log cabin built in 1831 by a man named Everton. Runyon built the first frame house; all others were built of rough-hewn logs. The first building of any real importance was the Canal Office, now the Museum here in Lockport. The first Post Office was established in 1836, and Edward P. Bush was the first Post Master.

M. NORTH: What about my great-great-grandparents, the Boyers?

W. NORTH: Charles E. Boyer was a contractor of the construction of the old I & M Canal. He was elected to the legislature in 1862 and was a candidate for the state senate at the time of his death in 1868 of typhoid fever. He was married to Elizabeth, one of Armstead Runyon's

daughters. A son of Charles Boyer, J.A. Boyer, opened a stone quarry in 1869. Mr. Boyer produced in Lemont a superior quality of stone, furnished the materials for the beautiful stone-front buildings erected on the west side of Chicago and also St. Dennis Catholic Church in Lockport. Other interests in Lockport were the first steel plows invented in 1835 by John Lane. The plow sold for \$15.50 in 1839. Thirty-five years after the arrival of the first settlers Lockport was incorporated as a village in 1853.

M. NORTH: What about the big fire of 1895?

W. NORTH: In August, about the 10th, in 1895 a fire began on the roof of the McDonald Building, east of State and Tenth Streets. It swept north, destroying all the buildings in the block between State and Hamilton Streets. The fire leaped north and destroyed the Boyer barn and the grade school. The Boyer house caught fire many times but was saved. The only building saved is now the Miller's Hardware Store. The Chicago fire engines were rushed on the Chicago and Alton Railroad and were able to reach here in time to get the fire under control. The Miller's Hardware Store, which is now, was saved because the owner of the building had a water tower on top of the Tenth Street hill by the Methodist Church. There was an old water main came down, and he had some kind of water sprinklers in his building which saved it from the great fire.

M. NORTH: Tell us a little bit about Runyon Park.

W. NORTH: Runyon Park is a place north of Lockport where Runyon's cabin was, and it laid there in wastelands for a long time until the C. C. C. boys fixed it up as a park. They found a graveyard up there on top of the

hill overlooking the park -- a small cemetery where Runyon and his family are buried.

M. NORTH: Dad, getting to later history of Lockport, what do you remember of Dellwood Park?

W. NORTH: The property was purchased by the Chicago-Joliet Electric Railway Company on July 4, 1906, being called Dellwood because of the rolling hills and green valleys. The railroad officials spent about three million dollars to turn it into one of the most outstanding and beautiful park sites in this part of the state. As many as five thousand spectators once sat in the grandstand in the park to watch ball games and sulkey races. The Joliet Standard Baseball Team used the diamond as their home base for many years. Many famous baseball teams -- Detroit, Chicago, and Brooklyn appeared at Dellwood between the years 1906 and 1914. The grandstand was built at a cost of ten thousand dollars; it burned to the ground in December of 1937. The boathouse on the park lagoon burned down in about 1938. Also burned down was the restaurant and washrooms -- they were consumed by fire. The bathhouse on the grounds were leveled by fire. Many times I enjoyed riding on the scenic railway down there, which went all over the park and all over the lagoon around the place. It was very pretty -- I rode it many, many times. It was torn down in 1935; it was dismantled because it was considered unsafe. The historic water tower and ice cream stand were also taken down in 1935. They had a projection booth -- a screen and outdoor movie theatre that they dismantled from the change in the park. The auditorium pavillion was erected in 1908 at a cost of sixty thousand dollars. It accommodated seven hundred couples. The orchestra was situated in the

center of the round pavillion, and the dancing area was on the outer rim with a promenading area overlooking the lagoon. Some of the famous dance bands of the country appeared at the park pavillion during its heyday. The national pavillion was torn down in 1940, and all that remains is some of the footing stones that were there. During the park's existence as many as fifteen thousand persons were at the park on weekends during company picnics. Near the park entrance on the west side of Illinois (Route) 171 there is a railway depot where they let passengers off the train by an underground tunnel which has since been covered over. As you came across under the street, there was also a tunnel that went under the dam. There was also a walk that went under the dam from the north to the south. The lagoon was used for boating and ice-skating in the wintertime. Around in the summer of 1940 the property was sold to the Sisters of Saint Joseph -- a Chicago Province -- who intended to build a convent on the site; but thirteen years later the Sisters were given a tract of land in Wisconsin, and the Lockport Park District took the property over. The only landmarks that are still remaining in the park are the small bandstand where orchestras and concerts were given and a concrete bridge which has been kept in constant repair. The bridge was recently completely renovated. I have very many pleasant memories of Dellwood even though I was a young boy at the time. There's one more building I don't want to forget -- the building at Tenth and Commerce Streets in Lockport, which is estimated to be about a century old. Allan G. Hawley sold the building to Pitts and Demmick in 1903. It is not known who built this building, but during the 1870's Hawley operated a printing establishment on the ground floor and published the Will County Commercial Advertiser. Dick Kern was a partner of his. Hawley was known as an enterprising businessman when he installed a

steam-powered generator in the building. The power from the generator was used to light five arc lights in downtown Lockport. The building was also used for a very popular dance hall located on the second floor. In more recent years the building was used for a feed and coal store. The Hawleys were mentioned previously -- they are my ancestors. I believe this building has been torn down about six or seven years. Thanks for having me do this; it was a lot of fun.

M. NORTH: I think the history of Lockport is most interesting because my ancestors played such an important part in its early times. Thanks, Dad, for all the time you took for this interview -- laryngitis and all -- for this informative account of its history.

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